Parent Guide
to the
March 2004

2003 Similar Schools Ranks
based on the
Academic Performance Index

In March 2004, public schools in California received their fifth Academic Performance Index (API) Base reports. The API is the cornerstone of the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999. It measures the academic performance and progress of schools. Annual growth targets for future academic improvement are determined for schools based on the API. Schools that reach their annual targets may be rewarded. Schools that do not meet their targets may be eligible for interventions or subject to sanctions. The similar schools ranks are provided in the API Base reports.

API

The API is a numeric index or scale that ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. A school's score or placement on the API is an indicator of a school's performance level. The state has set 800 as the API score that schools should strive to meet. A school's growth is measured by how well it is moving toward (or past) that goal. Schools that fall short of 800 will be required to meet annual growth targets until the statewide target of 800 is reached. Schools that already meet or exceed the statewide target of 800 should continue working to improve the academic performance of all of their students.

API Indicators

The API score summarizes the results of various indicators (i.e., statewide assessments used in calculating the API). Indicators used in calculating the 2003 API Base include:

Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program
- California Standards Tests (CSTs)
  - English-Language Arts, grades two through eleven, including a writing assessment at grades four and seven
  - Mathematics, grades two through eleven
  - History-Social Science, grades ten and eleven
  - **NEW:** Science, grades nine through eleven
  - **NEW:** California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA) in English-language arts and mathematics, grades two through eleven
- Norm-referenced test (NRT)
  - California Achievement Test, Sixth Edition Survey (CAT/6 Survey) all content areas, grades two through eleven

2003 California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)
- CAHSEE, grade ten in English-language arts and mathematics

2003 API Base Reports

Generally, API results are reported twice a year: (1) base year reports after the first of the calendar year and (2) growth reports each fall. This pair of reports is based on APIs calculated in exactly the same fashion with the same indicators but using test results from two different years.

The 2003 API Base reports for a school include the following:
- 2003 API Base score (scale of 200 to 1000)
- 2003 statewide rank (scale of 1 to 10)
- 2003 similar schools rank (scale of 1 to 10)
- 2003–04 API growth target
- 2004 API target (Base plus growth target)
- Subgroup information
- Demographic information

Schools in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) and school districts receive API Base scores but do not receive ranks. The API reports and detailed information about the API can be found on the California Department of Education (CDE) Web site at *http://api.cde.ca.gov*.

Looking Ahead — The 2003–04 API Growth Report

In the fall of 2004, schools will receive their 2003–04 API Growth reports. These reports will include the following information for most schools:

- 2003–04 school growth (2004 API Growth score minus 2003 API Base score)

- 2003–04 growth for numerically significant groups of students in the school

- Whether growth targets were met

- Whether the school is eligible for awards

Decile Ranks

Schools' API scores are ranked separately within school type: elementary, middle, and high schools. For each of the three categories, schools' API scores are first sorted from lowest to highest statewide and then divided into ten equal groups (or deciles) ranked from lowest (one) to highest (ten). This first process produces the statewide ranks. A second decile ranking compares each school's API score to those of 100 other schools that have "similar characteristics." This second process produces the similar schools ranks.

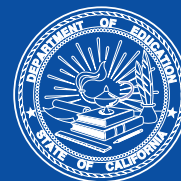| Statewide Ranks	Similar Schools Ranks
• Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, high school)	• Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, high school)
• School's API compared to all other schools in the state	• School's API compared to 100 other schools with similar demographic characteristics

Similar Schools Ranks

The API reports include a "similar schools rank." This information shows where a school ranks academically on a scale of 1–10, compared with 100 other schools with similar demographic characteristics. California public schools serve students with many different backgrounds and needs. As a result, schools face different educational challenges. The similar schools ranks allow schools to look at their academic performance compared to other schools with some of the same opportunities and challenges.

The comparison of similar schools is required by the PSAA [Education Code Section 52056(a)] and provides additional information about schools beyond that provided by APIs and statewide ranks. However, similar schools ranks are not used to establish eligibility for awards or interventions provided by the PSAA. The PSAA also requires that similar school comparisons be based on specified demographic school characteristics.

Demographic Characteristics Used to Identify Similar Schools

The PSAA law requires that the following school demographic characteristics, or factors, be used to identify the similar schools:

School Demographic Characteristics	How Characteristics Are Determined
Pupil mobility	% of students who first attended the school in the current year
Pupil ethnicity	% of students in the school in each of these ethnic categories: • African American (not of Hispanic origin) • Hispanic or Latino • American Indian or Alaska Native • Pacific Islander • Asian • White (not of Hispanic origin) • Filipino
Pupil socioeconomic status	Average of all parent education level responses for the school % of students in the school who participated in the free or reduced price lunch program, also known as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
Percent of teachers who are fully credentialed	% of teachers in the school who are fully credentialed
Percent of teachers who hold emergency credentials	% of teachers in the school who hold emergency permits
Percent of pupils who are English learners	% of students in the school who are classified as English learners
Average class size per grade level	Average class size at the school for each grade level: • K–3 • 4–6 • Core academic courses in departmentalized programs
Whether the schools operate multi-track year-round educational programs	Schools are categorized as either operating or not operating multi-track year-round educational programs

Similar Schools Ranks Questions and Answers

What is the purpose of comparing similar schools in the API report?

California public schools serve groups of students with different backgrounds and needs. As a result, schools face different educational challenges and opportunities. For this reason, it is helpful to provide information about a school's academic achievement as it compares to similar schools.

How are the similar schools ranks used?

The similar schools ranks can be used in at least two ways. First, schools can use this information as a reference point for judging their academic achievement against other schools facing similar challenges. Second, schools may improve their academic performance by studying what similar schools with higher rankings are doing. Similar schools ranks are not used in any way as the basis for awards or sanctions.

What sources were used to collect the demographic data for the 2003 similar schools ranks?

The demographic data for the similar schools ranks came from several sources, including the 2003 administration of the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program and the 2002 California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS). The CBEDS is a data collection conducted by the CDE.

What steps are used in calculating the similar schools ranks?

Several steps were used to calculate the similar schools ranks. First, schools were divided into grade level categories (elementary, middle, and high schools). Then, the School Characteristics Index (SCI), a composite of the school's demographic characteristics, was calculated for each school. Next, a comparison group of 100 similar schools was formed, based on similar SCIs. Last, the similar schools rank for each school was calculated. This ranking was based on the school's API Base compared with the APIs of other similar schools in the comparison group.

What is the SCI and how is it calculated?

The SCI combines the demographic characteristics of a school. It is calculated through a statistical procedure that produces a single index based on all of the factors included. Schools with SCIs that are close in numerical value face similar educational challenges and opportunities.

Do all 100 schools in the same similar schools rank have the same demographic characteristics?

Each school is unique; therefore, it is impossible to find similar schools that match in every way. In order to form large enough groups of similar schools for meaningful ranks, the procedure used for each SCI allows for some differences between schools.

How is a specific similar schools rank determined?

A comparison group for each school was formed by placing the school's SCI as the median or mid-point (middle) and taking the 50 schools with SCIs just above and the 50 just below. The 100 schools in the comparison group were sorted according to their API Base and divided into 10 equal-sized groups (deciles). The API of the school was then compared to the APIs of the schools in its group. The school was assigned a decile rank based on this comparison, and that is the rank shown on the report.

How can I find out which schools are in the comparison group for my student's school?

The list of the 100 schools included in each school's similar schools comparison group can be found in the Similar School Report on the CDE Web site at *http://api.cde.ca.gov*.

Another school in the school district has similar students and almost exactly the same API score but a different "similar schools" rank. How can that be?

Even if schools appear quite similar, they may differ with respect to some measured characteristics. Small differences in two school's demographic characteristics and SCIs can result in very different groups of similar schools. If one school's comparison group has a different range of API scores than the other school, the two schools' ranks may differ.

Will the comparison group for my student's school remain the same from year to year?

No. Demographic characteristics change from year to year. In March 2004, your school received a 2003 similar schools rank, which compared the school's 2003 API level to a group of 100 similar schools. In January or February 2005, your school will receive a 2004 similar schools rank which will compare its 2004 API level to a *new* group of 100 similar schools.

If our school's API score remains the same next year, will its statewide rank be the same as 2003?

Your rank will not necessarily be the same next year, even if your API score remains the same. Your rank may go up or down, depending on how the rest of the schools in the state perform because your statewide rank is a comparison with other schools in the state.

How is a school's socioeconomic status measured?

Socioeconomic status is based on the school's average parent education level and percent of student participation in the free or reduced price lunch program. The source for parent education level and free or reduced price lunch program is the demographics section of the STAR answer document.

Is a school penalized in any way if the parent educational level is not reported for all students?

Although there is no penalty for *not* providing parent educational levels, a school should do its best to obtain complete information so that its similar schools rank can be as accurate as possible. Reliable parent education level information is helpful in calculating the most appropriate similar schools group for your school.

How can elementary school children, as young as second graders, be expected to report their parents' educational level?

Parent educational level information is provided by the school and school district. The method of collecting these data varies across the state, but schools and school districts should ensure that the information is as accurate as possible. Young children are not expected to provide this information unassisted.

The similar schools rank for my student's school is higher (about the same, lower) than its statewide rank. How should that be interpreted?

These ranks are calculated in completely different ways. The statewide API rank compares your school to other schools statewide. The similar schools rank compares your school to 100 schools similar to yours.

Does the calculation of the API or similar schools ranks affect the scores a student receives on statewide assessments?

No, the calculation of the API and the similar schools ranks does not affect the score a student receives on statewide asssessments.

How can the similar schools rank for my student's school be raised?

The SCI, from which the group of similar schools is determined, is designed to reflect demographic characteristics *not* under a school's control. The school should focus on ways to raise its API by improving instruction and student achievement. These efforts should help improve the academic growth of the school, its API, and its school rankings.

Where can families go for more information?

Parents/guardians and students should direct their questions about the API or the PSAA or plans for improving the school's academic performance to the principal or other school administrators. Schools also will be asking parents to become actively involved in the improvement process. Further information about the PSAA and API can be found on the CDE Web site at *http://www.cde.ca.gov/psaa*.

Description of Similar Schools Ranks

The similar schools ranks compare an individual school's API to the 100 schools in its comparison group. Schools are ranked in ten equal groups (deciles) from the lowest (one) to the highest (ten). A description of the **similar schools ranks** follows:

Rank	Description
	This school's API is:
9 or 10	Well-above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
7 or 8	Above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
5 or 6	About average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
3 or 4	Below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
1 or 2	Well-below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics